

Saudi Medical Journal and the burden of ethics misconduct

Saudi Medical Journal is a leader journal in the region, like any other biomedical journal it was established to publish accurate and useful information for doctors of various specialities, medical students, nurses, and paramedics. The question of what to publish among the huge number of submitted manuscripts every month, takes a lot of effort from the editorial staff. One has to be very careful of the standard of medical article with regard to its scientific content and fraud, and we follow a peer review system, which helps us in selecting the best among the submitted articles, and helps to improve them although it does not make them perfect. The submitted manuscripts undergo extensive search by the editors to discover fraud, repetition (“divided publications”) duplication and excessive plagiarism, and (“repetitive or divided publication”) where the information from a single research is divided for publications into 2 or more papers.

Duplicate publication (or duplicative publication) is the republication of the same information, either as an entire paper or information of smaller dimensions than a complete paper.¹

Redundant publication is publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published in print or electronic media. Publication of the same information in 2 languages is considered redundant publication.¹

Repetitive publication is the appearance of the same information 2, or more than 2, times. It readily covers the republication of an entire paper or a closely similar version representing the same body of research.¹

This does not preclude the journal considering a paper that has been rejected by another journal, or a complete report that follows publication of a preliminary report, such as an abstract or poster displayed for colleagues at a professional meeting. Nor does it prevent journals considering a paper that has been presented at a scientific meeting but not published in full or that is being considered for publication in a proceeding or similar format.¹

During the last year, we faced frequent cases of duplication and plagiarism, and divided publication. As we all know each biomedical journal is facing these kinds of problems, and in fact a number of bibliometric studies of duplication in various field have found that as many as 12-28% of published articles may be classified as duplicative of other articles. In order to minimize this problem, SMJ has adopted a screening system to which each submitted manuscript will be subjected, and unfortunately the rate of excessive plagiarism (unreferenced) was much higher than we anticipated. We consider this an ethical crises, and these manuscripts demand a lot of time and effort from the editors, which will cause delay in publication, namely, elongate the time from submission to publication, carrying a negative impact on the journal quality. In order to maintain quality, our rejection increased by 22% (Table 1), however, unfortunately, we do not have the statistics of how many of our rejected manuscripts found a chance to be published in other indexed journals.

Table 1 - Statistics for the year 2006-2007.

Manuscript status	Year 2006	Year 2007	Difference %
Received	1352	1432	6
Accepted	495	277	-44
Rejected	794	965	22

Our policy for handling these ethical issues comes in accordance with the regulations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).¹

Normally the journal editors have limited reason to interfere with the publication recommendation of the reviewer, however, sometimes after the article has been accepted for publication, we discover such unethical manipulation or “ethical misconduct”. In order to save the time and effort of the editors and final disappointment of both sides (editors and authors) we insist that the author should provide clear information about the submitted manuscript (1) if any part of the material exist elsewhere in an unpublished form; (2) if similar material is under consideration by another journal (3) has been or is about to be published elsewhere. In the case of a highly similar published article, the author should provide the editor with a copy of the other article, so that the editor can decide whether the contents of the manuscripts or articles are in fact duplicative.²

If redundant or duplicate publication is attempted or occurs without such notification, authors should expect editorial action to be taken (*Appendix 1).³

Appendix 1

1. A letter of explanation to the authors.
 2. A letter of reprimand and warning as to future conduct.
 3. Prompt rejection of the submitted manuscript.
 4. A notice of redundant or duplicate publication will probably be published with or without the author's explanation or approval.
 5. The head of the Institution will be notified.
 6. Refusal to accept future submissions (2 years).
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Further Reading

1. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication. Updated October 2007. Available from URL: <http://www.icmje.org/>
2. Ethical and Legal considerations. In: Inverson C, Flanagan A, Fontanarosa PB, Glass RM, Glitman P, Lantz JC, et al. American Medical Association. Manual of Style. 9th ed. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1998. p. 100.
3. Committee on Publication Ethics. Guidelines on good publication and the Code of Conduct. Available from URL: <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/guidelines>

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